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CONTACT:

Diane Baedeker Petit
413-253-4371, cell: 508-965-8417
Diane.Petit@ma.usda.gov

Cranberry farm tour marks 10 years of conservation planning

WEST WAREHAM, Mass. -- The Plymouth County Conservation District (PCCD) marked a decade of helping cranberry growers develop plans to protect the region's natural resources on June 18th with a tour of three cranberry operations involved in the District's ten-year-old Cranberry Farm Planning Program. Awards were also presented to cranberry professionals.

Cranberry growers spoke about and demonstrated work done through their conservation plans, much of which addressed water quality and water quantity concerns. Federal and state officials, including Cecil Currin, State Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Douglas Gillespie, Massachusetts Commissioner of Agricultural Resources, were on-hand to speak about the importance of the program.

"The Cranberry Farm Planning Program was started to meet the growing demand for farm conservation plans in the commonwealth's cranberry growing counties," said Currin, adding that pilot funding from the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Assoc. was matched by the state Executive Office of Environmental Affairs and NRCS.

The first stop on the tour was Edgewood Trust's Queen Bog in Carver. General Manager Matt Rhodes described the conservation issues that he addresses in conjunction with owner Donna Jeffers.

Water quality and quantity management concerns were addressed through installation of a by-pass canal that routes water around the bog instead of through it. The canal was engineered through NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The irrigation system was updated through an NRCS grant with co-funding from a state Agro-Environmental Technology grant. Edgewood also reconstructed their bogs for more efficient management and harvesting using less water.

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While at the Edgewood bog, several members of the cranberry industry were presented with recognition awards for their conservation efforts.

William Madden, PCCD Chairman, presented a Commitment Award to Peter Beaton, President of the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association (CCCGA), and Jeffrey LeFleur, CCCGA Executive Director, recognizing the association's on-going support through funding and other resources.

Robert Lessard, PCCD Vice Chairman, presented a Conservation Award to Chris Makepeace of the A.D. Makepeace Company recognizing 40 years of conservation planning and natural resource protection.

PCCD supervisor Dick Ward presented an Innovation award to Buzzards Bay cranberry grower and former PCCD supervisor David Mann for lifetime achievement in water conservation.

Len Reno, NRCS District Conservationist for Plymouth, Bristol and Norfolk counties, presented a Leadership Award to Matt Rhodes of Edgewood Trust recognizing the company's early involvement in conservation planning, serving as a model for other growers.

Cecil Currin, USDA-NRCS State Conservationist, presented a certificate of appreciation to PCCD Chairman William Madden recognizing the district's decade of conservation planning work.

The tour then moved on to Wareham to view bogs owned A.D. Makepeace, the commonwealth's largest cranberry company, whose conservation plans are in various stages. Current and future work will not only protect natural resources but also help the operation stay competitive.

Water quality and quantity management are also the primary conservation concerns for A.D. Makepeace general manager George Rogers. A proposed by-pass canal will route a stream around the bog during key times in the production cycle.

Water conservation and quality are critical issues for Parker Mills bogs in Wareham, as well, especially because the bogs share water resources with town. Owner Peter Beaton is now in the early stages of conservation planning for upcoming changes that may result from construction of a proposed town well site adjacent to the property.